

**0542**

## **Education for employment and life: using information from international surveys**

Sarah Maughan

*NFER, Slough, Berks, United Kingdom*

### **Background**

Much of the policy development in the area of skills is informed at least in part by the information arising from international surveys run by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In particular, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) provides an overview of the knowledge and skills of 15-year olds, as they approach the end of compulsory education and move on to further study or join the work force. The PISA website states that 'Every three years, it [PISA] assesses how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills essential for full participation in society.' ([www.pisa.oecd.org](http://www.pisa.oecd.org)) PISA has been running since 2000 and it assesses the domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy, not as described in the school curriculum but as a predictive indicator of potential in adult life.

A lesser known international study into skills was the International Assessment of Adult Literacy, which measured the literacy skills in the adult population in a number of countries in the late 1990s. Further development to this model has resulted in the development of a new survey: the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competences (PIAAC). It is hoped that PIAAC will run in England in 2011/2012. PIAAC aims to develop a strategy to address the supply and demand of competencies that would:

- identify and measure differences between individuals and countries in competencies believed to underlie both personal and societal success
- assess the impact of these competencies on social and economic outcomes at individual and aggregate levels
- gauge the performance of education and training systems in generating required competencies
- help to clarify the policy levers that could contribute to enhancing competencies.

([www.oecd.org/els/employment/piaac](http://www.oecd.org/els/employment/piaac))

### **Research Questions**

This research will review the findings from international surveys in England and map the impact of the surveys on policy developments. In particular it will answer the following questions.

- What have the international surveys of skills conducted in England over the last 25 years told us about our level of skills?
- What impact have the findings had on policy developments?
- How have the findings impacted on provision in terms of curriculum, funding and overall provision?
- What conclusions can be drawn about the overall impact of participation in international surveys on skills levels?
- What further benefits, if any, could be obtained from our participation?

The research will then consider the possible future uses that can be made of the PIAAC data. In particular, there will be a discussion about the questions that should be required of the country report.

## **Methods**

The research will involve a review of literature relating to the assessments and the performance of England along with the timing of the surveys. This will be followed by a mapping of policy documents relating to skills against the different surveys in use at different points in time. The implementation of those policies will then be traced in an attempt to map the impacts of the surveys on the system. Other factors affecting policy and its implementation will be briefly considered.

Literature will include the ALS and PISA country reports, policy documents relating to skills development in England, and research papers evaluating these developments.

The research will also consider the plans for the PIAAC survey and discuss what findings could be of value.

## **Frame**

The analytical frame will ensure that the literature sources are assessed consistently and rigorously against each of the research questions, drawing out key messages and themes. The results of the literature search will be mapped against a range of policy documents relating to skills, allowing an objective view on the impacts of the results on the system.

## **Research findings**

The research is under way now and the findings will be disseminated for the first time at Bera 2010. The research will contribute to the debate about England's participation in international surveys of skills. It will highlight the value that can be obtained from such participation and make recommendations about further analysis that could be carried out to get greater benefit.

## **Impact and relevance to the learning and skills sector**

International survey data is directly relevant to the development of policy for skills and education. For example, surveys of students aged 15 give a valuable insight into the skills and education levels of future adult society and can help policy makers, employers and education providers prepare for meeting skills gaps and making the best use of the skills and knowledge available in our society.